

OUTDOORS

Stay near the shallows for May bass action

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
FOR THE JOURNAL

Every bass angler in the Upstate looks forward with zeal to the annual spawning rituals of their favorite black bass species. It's shallow-water fishing at its most challenging, and often most rewarding.

When the spawn is over, the consolation for bass anglers is there is no need to stop targeting spawning fish. The difference is that these fish are not the target species, but the prey of largemouth bass. Most anglers refer to this pattern as the "shad spawn."

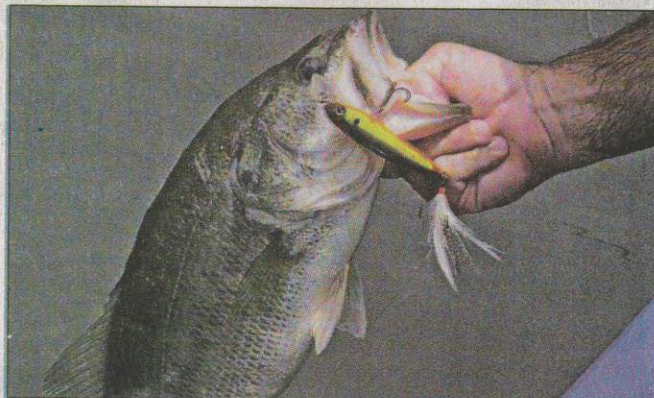
The name is actually as misnomer, because when water temperatures reach between 67 and 75 degrees, a lot more forage-base spawning goes on than just shad.

Many bass anglers may be targeting spawning shad, but they're doing it at the wrong time of day and in the wrong places.

Most of our Upstate reservoir lakes are also herring lakes. When you see bass anglers pulling up to long shallow points and making casts across the points, most likely they are keying in on spawning herring.

Threadfin shad tend to spawn in shallow water, but they prefer to have deep water close by, or they may spawn on shallow structure over deep water. Shad also want some kind of structure to rub their eggs on.

Shad are also drawn to upper sections of the lake where structure and deeper water mix — creek arms, deep water docks, bridge pilings and deep



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Once the bass spawn is over, there's no need to leave the shallows during the month of May.

water rip-rap.

Despite their differences, most bass anglers will use lures that imitate shad and herring when fishing for them.

One of the downsides of depending on fishing the shad spawns is that most all of them spawn at night, and bass will feed on them early and late and all through the night.

Typically, the best bite is going to come the first hour or two of daylight, then it's going to break up and you'll need to find another pattern to depend on for daytime fishing.

Targeting herring is a different matter. Herring are known to be spooky, but they'll hold on long points longer into the day. Many anglers adopt a run-and-gun philosophy with bass that are targeting herring and will hit multiple spots, only making a handful of casts in each one, then move on to the next.

Along with these three species of forage, additional food sources include the fry of almost everything that has spawned in the last two months.

As suggested, shad and herring are not the

only pro-creative fish in the shallows, as the bass spawn/shad spawn/bream spawn all tend to overlap ends when water conditions are right. Do not overlook the opportunity to catch a big resident bass that is hanging out on the edge of a bream bed waiting for something to get out of line.

The backs of secondary coves and cuts — as well as sandy points and rocky sandbars — are favored spawning grounds of several species of bream.

While the majority of bass in a lake are looking for shad to eat during the spawn, it's generally the larger bass that target bream beds.

Another factor to consider is that when spawning and brood rearing are taking place in the shallows, it's not just bass that are on the hunt. Salamanders, crayfish and other aquatic creatures are also on the hunt and very often find themselves becoming food for shallow water bass.

PHILLIP GENTRY is the host of PG & Boatgirl Outdoors. Download the podcast on Apple, Google Play, Spotify or at pgandboatgirl.com.